

The Trouble with Chickens

- **Bibliographic information:** Cronin, Doreen. (2011). *The Trouble with Chickens: A J.J. Tully Mystery*. Cornell, Kevin, illustrator. New York, NY: HarperCollins. 120 pages. Ages 7-11.
- **Summary:**
 - J.J. Tully is a retired rescue dog that calls Barb's suburban backyard home. When two chicks from a family of chickens go missing, he turns on his search and rescue skills to find them. Along the way, J.J. employs the help of Sugar, Dirt (missing chick's siblings), and Moosh (the missing chicks' mother) to find out who kidnapped the chicks and where they were taken.
- **Awards Received:**
 - Red Dot 2013: Younger Readers: Long List
- **Book Reviews:**
 - Publisher's Weekly: "Fast-paced and funny, with interesting vocabulary and a well-constructed plot, this is terrific fare for readers who are ready to move beyond picture books, but are intimidated by longer works. Cornell's pencil drawings have a mix of energy and humor that adds to the fun. Ages 8–12. (Mar.)"
<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/trouble-with-chickens-doreen-cronin/1102006000?ean=9780061215346>
 - Booklist: "The plot is a bit convoluted, and when the narrator changes in the middle of the book, even experienced readers might be confused. But the noirlike detective Tully and the funny chickens running around, well, like chickens make appealing characters, especially as drawn by Cornell, who knows how to get TV cartoon-style humor out of the action. Readers can expect to see more of Tully at work in future installments of this new series. Grades 3-5. --Ilene Cooper"
http://www.amazon.com/Trouble-Chickens-Tully-Mystery-Mysteries/dp/0061215341/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1364264858&sr=1-1&keywords=The+Trouble+with+Chickens
- **Author Doreen Cronin's Webpage:** <http://www.doreencronin.com>
- **Illustrator Kevin Cornell's Children's Webpage:** <http://www.kevskinrug.com>
His adult website has bad language and is not even linked to his children's website "because it's too racy for kids." If you'd like to check it out:
<http://www.bearskinrug.co.uk/>
- **Discussion questions:**
 - **Pre-reading questions**
 - Have you ever lost something and needed to find it? What was it? How did you find it?
 - How do dogs help with search and rescue?
 - Describe a time when you didn't really like someone but then got to know him or her and realized you were more alike than you thought.
 - **Questions during reading**
 - Who do you think kidnapped the chicks?
 - Where did Sugar go? How did she get out of the birdbath?
 - Why did Vince want to kidnap the chicks?

- Why did Vince use the chicks to get “Hero Dog” in the house?
- **Post-reading questions**
 - What is the importance of being an insider vs. an outsider?
 - At the end of the story, is J.J. still an outsider? Why?
 - How does J.J. save the chicks? How do the Chicks save J.J?
- **Activities in as many of the following areas as possible:**
 - **Reading/oral language**
 - Read the group as a class, or in small literature circles (4-5 students). Give each student an opportunity to read a sentence, paragraph, page aloud.
 - Pay special attention to the pages with difficult vocabulary. Challenging vocabulary includes: behooves, rendezvous, twilight, silhouette mangy, brood.
 - **Writing**
 - While reading, allow students to journal responses to who they think did kidnapped the chicks, why characters did certain things, how J.J. will rescue the chicks, etc.
 - Create an alternate ending to the story. J.J. is trapped inside the cage, Vince is planning to kill the chickens once they take his funnel off... What will happen to the chicks and J.J?
 - Students can create their own mystery after reading *The Trouble with Chickens*. Include the exposition (introduction of characters), problem or rising action, climax (big scene where everything is revealed), and the solution.
 - Watch Doreen Cronin’s advice on writing to inspire students to continue to write.
 - <http://kidsbookbuzz.blogspot.com/2012/04/blog-post.html>
 - Doreen Cronin’s video link is at closer to the bottom of the page. <http://www.nbclearn.com/portal/site/learn/writers-speak-to-kids>
 - **Math**
 - Keep track of how many chicks Vince has captured in the house
 - Students are able to figure out old students are be in dog years by multiplying their age by 7 (p. 63).
 - **Science**
 - Doreen Cronin includes recycling concepts in *The Trouble with Chickens*. Encourage students to recycle their plastic bottles.
 - Place plastic bottle side by side to move small boxes, books, and other light-medium weight objects, like the chicks did to move J.J. Tully into the cage. Challenge the students to find a way to make the design more efficient. Compare the design to conveyer belts today.
 - **Social Studies**
 - Discuss the theme of inside and outside throughout the book. Tully spent his life as an outsider, but becomes an insider when the chickens accept him into their family. Students will describe a time they felt like an outsider, and a time when they were accepted as part of something (family, sports team, academic team, group of friends).
 - **Art**

- Students can draw pictures of the backyard vs. the front yard. J.J. comments that Barb decorated the front yard, but not the backyard.
- **Drama**
 - Give students creative freedom to turn the book into a One Act play. Assign a group of students to write the script, another group to the set design, and one group to costumes. Groups will be supervised and everything must be approved. Perform the play for other classes in the school. Invite parents and community members as well. Students enjoy working creatively and showing their parents and friends their hard work.
- **Technology**
 - Poppy and Sweetie told J.J. Tully that they went into the house to watch TV, but stayed for the books. Read students the beginning chapter of a book then show the relating beginning scene of the movie. Discuss which one grabbed students' attention more, if the screen displayed student's expectations of the book. Allow students to be honest, while encouraging them to read the book before watching the movie.
 - Watch digital book trailer to capture students' interests before reading http://www.scholastic.com/bookfairs/books/videos_all.asp?bcpid=73539002001&bckey=AQ~~,AAAAFv844g~,BASb5BU03X_o-Ir6jeODyg3UqvFSQKs2&bclid=1377063703001&bctid=1370591194001
- **Cooking/food**
 - While reading, bring in small amounts of chicken feed to show students how it looks and smells.
- **Related books**
 - The Legend of Diamond Lil: A J.J. Tully Mystery written by Doreen Cronin, illustrated by Kevin Cornell
 - Attack of the Fluffy Bunnies by Andrea Beaty, illustrated by Dan Santat
- **Other titles by Doreen Cronin**
 - Click, Clack Series
 - Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type
 - Click, Clack, Splish, Splash: A Counting Adventure
 - Click, Clack, 123
 - Click, Clack, ABC
 - Click, Clack, Quackity-Quack
 - Giggle, Giggle, Quack
 - Thump, Quack, Moo: A Whacky Adventure
 - A Busy Day at the Farm
 - The Diary of... Series
 - Diary of a Worm
 - Diary of a Fly
 - Diary of a Spider
 - Diary of a Worm: Teacher's Pet
 - Dooby Dooby Moo
 - Duck for President
 - Vote for Duck
 - Rescue Bunnies

- M.O.M. (Mom Operating Manual)
- Wiggle
- Stretch
- Bounce
- The Legend of Diamond Lil: A J.J. Tully Mystery
- **Other titles by Kevin Cornell**
 - Mustache!
 - The Curious Case of Benjamin Button: A Graphic Novel
 - The Legend of Diamond Lil: A J.J. Tully Mystery
- **Websites for further study or enrichment**
 - <http://dramaintheclassroom.weebly.com/drama-in-the-classroom.html>
Teacher Sheli Blackburn describes her techniques and successes of using children led drama in her classroom to teach literature in her primary classroom. Follow the Pearl tree link at the bottom of the page to access some specific techniques on implementing drama into your classroom.
 - <http://www.harpercollinschildrens.com/books/Trouble-With-Chickens/?isbn13=9780061215322&tctid=100>
Check out the publisher's page on *The Trouble with Chickens* to access more titles from author, Doreen Cronin, and illustrator, Kevin Cronin. Downloadable audio excerpt from the book.
 - <http://kidsbookbuzz.blogspot.com/2012/04/blog-post.html>
Watch Doreen Cronin discuss her writing and books. After reading *The Trouble with Chickens* (the first J.J. Tully book) introduce *The Legend of Diamond Lil: A J.J. Tully Mystery* (the second J.J. Tully Mystery).